

A Parent's Guide to Preventing Underage Drinking



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by Celine Provini, Ph.D.

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NOTE: This guide at points addresses Connecticut specifically (for example, statistics on alcohol use among Connecticut teens and state-specific laws that apply to underage drinking). Since underage drinking is a problem across the nation, however, the contents of this publication are considered to be broadly applicable.



Dear Parents,

There are few things more anxiety-provoking for parents than the thought of their children abusing alcohol. This guide is designed to bring you up to date on the latest information and laws regarding underage drinking, providing an honest examination of the issue as well as some proven tools to help you address it. Many of us at The Governor's Prevention Partnership are parents ourselves, and our goal in creating this guide was to reach out to you the way we would to our own friends and family.

We, along with our partners at the Connecticut Office of Policy and Management and Health Net, want to make sure that your son or daughter—and every Connecticut youth—grows up safe, successful and drug-free. By reading this guide, you've taken an important first step in helping make this happen. Trust us—your kids will appreciate your concern, even if they don't tell you. We encourage you to take advantage of the suggestions in this guide and share them with other parents. Visit www.preventionworksct.org to learn more.

If you have questions, we're always here to help.

Jill Spinetti

President and CEO
The Governor's Prevention Partnership

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Myths and Facts About Underage Drinking

Imagine that you're eavesdropping on a group of parents discussing the topic of underage drinking. Have you — or has someone you know — said or thought any of the following? It makes sense to examine a few common assumptions and see how they compare to what experts know about underage drinking.

MYTH 1: Underage drinking? Not *my* child.

Some parents assume their kids aren't drinking (and that only *other* kids use alcohol). Some parents may suspect their sons and daughters are drinking but take no further steps to investigate because they are afraid of what they might find out. Some parents may not be that concerned, even though they *know* their children are drinking. Do any of these descriptions fit you?

Consider a recent survey done in one typical suburban Connecticut town. Three-quarters of high-school juniors and seniors in town reported drinking, based on a school survey. A parent survey in the same town, however, revealed that fewer than *one in four* parents were concerned about their child drinking. This means that about half of parents in town seem to be either *unaware of*, *in denial about*, or *actively allowing* their child's drinking.¹ Let this story serve as a gentle reminder—it may be difficult to acknowledge how widespread underage drinking is, but it's in your and your son or daughter's best interest that you understand the reality of the issue.

The truth is that if you were to step inside a Connecticut high school today and take a poll, very close to two out of three seniors would tell you that they drank in the past month. In a classroom of 30 high-school seniors, at least 12 of the students probably drank enough to get drunk last month—likely drunk enough to become ill.² Further, at least six students in the class could be considered on the path to developing an alcohol or drug dependency.³

As of 2007, the rate of underage drinking among American high-school students had actually *decreased* by about 10% over the previous 10 years, and heavy drinking had decreased by about 20%.⁴ More recent national student surveys, however, have revealed that this trend is reversing, with past-month alcohol use rising among 9th to 12th-graders.⁵ The fact that 42% of Connecticut high-school seniors report heavy drinking in the past month indicates that there is plenty of cause for concern.²

Visit one of Connecticut's college campuses to take the same poll, and an even higher percentage—*three-quarters*—

In their own words...

A 19-year-old male college student in Connecticut offers his honest perspective. He describes himself as a good student who is close with friends and family. He is involved in extracurricular activities and plans to attend graduate school.

Do you drink alcohol? If so, how often and how much?
Yes...three days a week. I'll drink until I black out... usually 10 or more drinks in a night.

Would you say that your drinking is "typical" of what happens at college?
Absolutely.

What makes you want to drink?
Boredom.

Do you ever worry that something bad will happen to you as a result of drinking?
I don't really worry so much about myself. I sometimes worry about others, though.

of students (including 70% of students under age 21) would tell you they've used alcohol in the past month. More than half (this number has increased in recent years) would probably tell you they drank *heavily* within the past two weeks.⁶ Were you aware that 18- to 22-year-olds increase their risk for heavy drinking simply by attending college?⁷ Despite a modest decline among high-school students, at college campuses across the country and in Connecticut, drinking has stayed consistently high. By some measures (frequency of intoxication and the number of drinks consumed in a sitting), the problem is actually getting worse among college students.⁸ Binge drinking rose by 40% among female college students between 1979 and 2006, putting their drinking on par with that of college males, whose binge drinking rate has remained high throughout this period.⁹

Teens are actually not that different from adults in terms of how *often* they drink, but they are quite different in terms of the *quantity* they drink in a sitting.¹⁰ Binge drinking, defined as four or more drinks in a sitting for girls and five or more drinks in a sitting for boys, doesn't even begin to capture some of the quantities consumed by youth. "Extreme drinking" is viewed as both competition and entertainment—visit youtube.com and search for "drinking games" to view young people starring in videos such as "100 Shots in 100 Minutes," and "Incredible Vodka Chug (chugging a 60-ounce bottle of vodka in one sitting)."

According to a study of one college campus, when students celebrated their 21st birthdays, females consumed

an average of nine drinks, while their male counterparts drank an average of 12. Not surprisingly, nearly half of these students blacked out as a result of their drinking.¹¹ Even more extreme, consuming 21 drinks on one's 21st birthday



Books of note...

[Smashed – Story of a Drunken Girlhood](#)

[From Binge to Blackout – A Mother and Son Struggle with Teen Drinking](#)

The above links to online resources are available at www.preventionworksct.org/parentguide.



has become a popular way of marking this milestone.¹² Further, youth increasingly drink with the primary motive of getting drunk, many even "pre-drinking" or "pre-gaming"—which involves rapid heavy drinking at home (or in a dorm room) before heading out to bars and clubs—in order to save money.¹³

In addition to recognizing how common underage drinking is, it's also important to remember that kids start drinking much *younger* than they may have when you were a teen. Don't make the mistake of thinking your son or daughter is safe because s/he is in middle school or has only just started high school. Some youth are now taking their first drink as young as age 8—that's third grade. Nearly two in 10 Connecticut high school students say they began drinking as "tweens"—that is, before age 13.² While the percentage of kids trying alcohol at young ages has actually



The take-home message:

If you think your child isn't drinking—and even if s/he says s/he isn't drinking—don't breathe a sigh of relief just yet. Although a great many youth consistently make wise choices, your son or daughter becomes more likely to drink as s/he advances through the high school grades, and particularly when s/he makes the transition to college. Remember that even well-intentioned kids may not have the maturity to do the safe thing all of the time, especially when they are in environments that seem to invite risky behavior. You probably remember feeling invincible as a teen or young adult. Now it's time to be a bit of a "worrywart" about youth alcohol use. Think honestly about whether you really know what your teen is up to. Talk to the parents of your child's friends. Think about your family's values and what limits you'll want to set regarding alcohol use.

gone down about 20% over the past decade⁴, young bodies are more sensitive than adults' when it comes to the damaging effects of alcohol—any use at a young age is definitely cause for concern.

MYTH 2: Only “troubled” kids drink.

It's true that youth experiencing life challenges are vulnerable to alcohol abuse. Many youth who start drinking at a young age have untreated mental health problems. Young people who have experienced physical or sexual abuse, or who have lived with a family member suffering from mental illness and/or substance abuse, are also more likely to start drinking early in life.¹⁴ It's important to keep your eyes and ears open for changes in your son or daughter's behavior that could indicate anxiety, depression or other issues. Don't wait for a crisis before seeking counseling or consulting with your child's physician, and make sure your teen is not exposed to role models who “self-medicate” by drinking to escape their problems. If you suspect you have an alcohol problem yourself, seek help immediately.



Adult self-screening for alcohol abuse

The above link to online resources is available at www.preventionworksct.org/parentguide.

On the flip side, remember that a great many well-adjusted young people—bright, happy, college-bound (or college-attending) kids—are also drinking, often heavily. Youth experience increasing pressure to get good grades; in fact, a national survey revealed that the top reason youth use substances is to cope with school pressure.¹⁵ Kids may also drink because they are “sensation-seekers” or because they simply haven't found a more creative use for their time. When asked why his peers drink, one high-school student from an affluent suburban Connecticut town remarked simply, “There's nothing to do here after 8 p.m.” This echoes the comments of the 19-year-old college student quoted earlier.

Alcohol use may look a bit different when you consider various groups of young people—for example, there's a higher likelihood of alcohol use among white youth



compared to youth of other races/ethnicities.²⁷ Athletes or members of fraternities and sororities also may be more likely to drink heavily.¹⁶ It would be unwise, however, to make parenting decisions about *your* child based only on what we know about large groups of youth. Underage drinking is a safety concern whenever and wherever it occurs—among boys and girls, in suburban and urban neighborhoods, within different racial/ethnic groups, and among youth from affluent and low-income families. Perhaps most importantly, don't assume that your child is protected because your family has no history of addiction.

Because peers are a strong influence on youth behavior, there are many benefits to your child socializing with youth who do well academically and show leadership in school activities such as sports. Unfortunately, given that underage drinking can occur at all economic levels, in all neighborhoods and among diverse groups of students, your child's positive peer group will not necessarily protect him/her from underage alcohol use.

Keep in mind that today's peer pressure doesn't always involve teasing, shaming or excluding kids who don't drink. Rather, experts describe what's called a “social norm” of underage alcohol use.¹⁷ Think about it—does a teen need to be *told* that she will be more popular if she drinks—or will she simply observe the drinking behavior of other popular girls and draw her own conclusions? Some kids feel empowered to say “no” to alcohol and do so with the support of



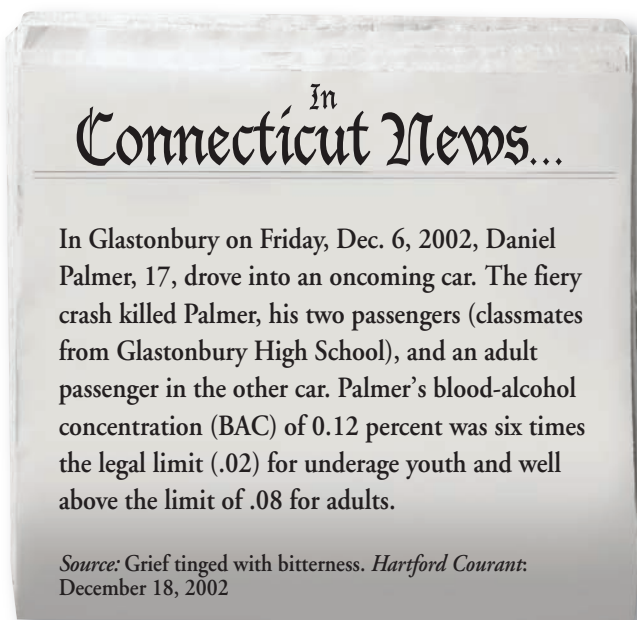
their friends. But many youth simply follow what they see the crowd doing—or what they assume the crowd is doing—without consciously experiencing pressure. One of our state's 20-year-old college students put it best when she said, "I can choose not to drink and my friends won't make fun of me or anything like that, but then what would I do on Saturday night? I'd be sitting alone in my room."

MYTH 3: Underage drinking isn't that dangerous...hey, I did it and survived.

If you're reading this, it's obvious you made it through your teenage years successfully, maybe even with a bit of luck on your side. "After all," you're probably thinking to yourself, "back in my day, underage drinking wasn't such a *big deal*." But consider this—is luck really what you want to depend on when it comes to your child's safety? Would you, for example, let your teenage son drive a car with faulty brakes, or let your daughter hitchhike across the country? Of course not. But the truth is that alcohol-related accidents are the leading cause of lost lives among 15- to 24-year-olds.¹⁸ By condoning or allowing underage drinking, you're taking more of a gamble than you may realize.

Even if you were able to guarantee your child's abstinence from alcohol, could it still be possible that due to the underage and high-risk drinking of your child's friends, your son or daughter attends a party and is physically assaulted, gets in a car crash by riding with a driver who's been drinking, or goes on a date and ends up having unwanted or unsafe sex? In fact, in Connecticut, the likelihood of physical fights doubles for high-school boys and girls who drink, compared to those who do not¹⁹, and the chances of driving after drinking or riding with someone who has been drinking increase steadily (along with alcohol-use rates) the closer our state's high-school students get to graduation.²

In Connecticut, if you were to follow 30 typical college students over the course of a year, you'd find that as a result of alcohol use: six would be injured, 12 would drive



under the influence, 13 would get into an argument or physical fight, nine would perform poorly on a test, 12 would miss a class, and 12 would do something they'd later regret.⁶ On college campuses nationally, nearly 100,000 alcohol-related sexual assaults and rapes occur each year.⁸

Most parents would agree that illicit drugs such as cocaine and heroin are harmful—the reality is that alcohol kills *four times* as many youth as all illegal drugs combined.²⁰ Alcohol-related injuries and deaths on college campuses have increased in recent years.⁸ More than 1,800 college students died from alcohol-related unintentional injuries in 2005.²¹ Further, the number of alcohol poisoning deaths nearly doubled between 1999 and 2005, and half of these



The take-home message:

If your son or daughter is on the honor roll, is a sports star or is a leader in a fraternity or sorority at his/her college, you deserve a pat on the back as a parent. Just remember that in terms of preventing alcohol use, your job doesn't end there. Likewise, living in a good neighborhood and enjoying privileges in life offers little protection against alcohol abuse. Don't assume that alcohol use is limited to kids with problems—in fact, sometimes alcohol use *becomes* the problem among otherwise well-adjusted, high-achieving youth. Also, because a teen's peers can influence drinking behavior without even saying a word, your teen will need an approach that goes beyond "just say no." Encourage your son or daughter to develop positive values that go beyond popularity, and to find creative, alcohol-free ways to feel "cool" and have fun.

victims were under age 21.²² Underage drinking is a factor in more than *two million* harmful events affecting American youth each year, including not only car crashes and alcohol poisonings, but also violence, unintended pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases and property damage.²⁰ Is the assumption that “it won’t happen to my child” a risk you’re prepared to take?

Consider also that the context in which your child is growing up is decidedly different from when you were a teen. Does your child have more spending money than you did? Better access to cars? Does your son or daughter have greater exposure to media and advertising that promote alcohol use? Does s/he have greater access to technology that allows youth culture to embrace extreme drinking (for a quick lesson, visit “Facebook.com,” search for “30 Reasons Girls Should Call it a Night” and check out some of the photos). Was “21 at 21” (consuming 21 drinks on one’s twenty-first birthday) popular when you were young? Does your child spend more time outside the home and away from his/her family, compared to you as a youth? Do you consider yourself as strict a parent as your parents were?

In addition, parents may not be aware of recent trends in the development and marketing of alcohol products and accessories that encourage young people to drink. Beer may have been the major option when you were growing up, but times have changed. A growing number of alcoholic beverages characterized as “alcopops” (sweet, fruity, often carbonated drinks that taste like popular kids’ beverages such as lemonade) may appeal to many teens, particularly girls who dislike the taste of alcohol.²³ Some argue that hard liquor companies sell alcopops to develop brand loyalty at a young age and encourage the transition to distilled spirits, which are increasingly popular among underage drinkers.^{22,24} Of teens who drink, almost a third say their drink of choice is hard liquor



For further reading...

[How Alcohol Can Damage a Teen’s Developing Brain, Causing Brain Impairment and Early Addiction](#)

[Wasting the Best and the Brightest: Substance Abuse at America’s Colleges and Universities](#)

[What Parents Need to Know About College Drinking](#)

[Girlie Drinks...Women’s Diseases](#)

The above links to online resources are available at www.preventionworksct.org/parentguide.

mixed with something sweet, compared to 16% whose top pick is beer.²⁵ Another trend, the adding of energy ingredi-

ents to alcoholic beverages, may offer youth the dangerous illusion of alertness while intoxicated, thereby increasing the risk of injury.²⁶ Clever devices even help young people to conceal alcohol under their clothes (take a look at www.drsneaky.com).

Underage drinking poses not only immediate risks, but also risks that creep up over time. Parents may believe that teens, compared to adults, can more easily bounce back from the physical effects of heavy drinking. In fact, the opposite is true. It used to be assumed that young

brains finished developing by about age 12; with scientific advances we now know that the brain doesn’t finish developing until about age 25. With that in mind, there is evidence that heavy drinking during adolescence, even

just once a month, may harm the still-growing brains of youth, leading to potentially permanent damage in terms of learning, memory, decision-making and reasoning.²⁷

Drinking at a young age can also “hijack” the brain’s reward pathways and increase the likelihood of addiction²⁸ (more on that in the next section).

The new knowledge we have about the effects of alcohol on the developing brain can be compared to the scientific evidence we now have about prevention of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). Prior to 1992, most babies were put to sleep on their bellies. Fast forward to today, when the majority of parents now put infants on their backs to sleep and thereby significantly reduce the risk of tragedy. It stands to reason, then, that our parenting behavior in terms of allowing or enabling young people to use alcohol needs to catch up with our knowledge about the risks of underage drinking. Parents are more likely to allow underage drinking if they themselves drank as teens²⁹, but is there any good reason this should be the case? Is drinking considered such an essential part of growing up in our culture that it’s worth any amount of risk?

MYTH 4: My son or daughter is drinking now, but s/he’ll grow out of it.

If you know that your child is drinking, don’t assume that s/he will simply grow out of the behavior. Drinking that begins in middle or high school generally increases once kids arrive at college. It’s true that some youth will decrease their alcohol use over time, generally by their mid-twenties. What parents may not realize is that half of males and a third of females who drink heavily as adolescents are still drinking heavily at age 30.³⁰

Did you know that Connecticut’s 18- to 25-year-olds are just as likely as older adults to meet the criteria for alcohol dependence—“real” alcoholism³¹? Young adults age 18-29 in Connecticut actually have the most need for treatment, compared to adults in other age groups. You also may be surprised to learn that the most common age at which individuals first get diagnosed as alcoholics is 19-20.³⁰ Nationally, *one in five* full-time college students meets the criteria for alcohol abuse (meaning that use of alcohol is significantly

In National News...

On the morning after the house party on Johnson Street, Jenna Foellmi and several other twentysomethings lay sprawled on the beds and couches. When a friend reached out to wake her, she was cold to the touch.

Foellmi, a 20-year-old biochemistry major at Winona State University [Minnesota], died of alcohol poisoning on Dec. 14, one day after she had finished her last exam of the semester. According to police reports, she had three beers during the day, then played beer pong — a drinking game — in the evening, and downed some vodka, too.

Jenna Foellmi worked to put herself through school, made the dean’s list one semester and was a high school member of Students Against Destructive Decisions, according to her mother.

Exactly how much Jenna drank that night isn’t clear. The coroner did not release her blood-alcohol level, saying only that it was “not compatible with life.”

Source: Drinking games prove deadly to college students.
Associated Press: July 8, 2008



The take-home message:

When it comes to underage drinking, don’t feel that you owe it to your child to let him/her behave the way you did as a teenager. Our culture is different now, alcoholic beverages have changed, and teens take risks to a more extreme level than your generation did. This, combined with the new knowledge we have about how drinking harms young brains, gives you good reason as a parent to set limits when it comes to your son or daughter’s alcohol use. While alcohol-related accidents are the major cause of serious harm to young people, the good news is that they are also highly preventable. Don’t expose your child to unnecessary risk—make sure your parenting is not “behind the times” regarding youth alcohol use.

interfering with their lives) or dependence (meaning that their bodies go through withdrawal symptoms such as tremors).⁸

Many youth may mistakenly believe that addiction can't happen to them. One self-described "typical" 20-year-old student attending college in Connecticut remarked, "Alcoholism is a disease; it has to do with chemicals in your body—not everyone can become an alcoholic." Adults who share this misperception should be aware that America's



young adults actually account for half of all individuals with alcohol dependence, and the majority of alcohol-dependent young people are well-educated, have good incomes, and have neither mental health problems nor a family history of alcoholism.³² Interestingly, the same college student quoted above believed that her friends who drink *would* have alcohol problems in the future, yet also claimed not to be

worried about possible negative consequences of her own drinking. Similar to the "unaware" parents responding to the survey described earlier, many underage drinkers seem to feel that "bad things can only happen to other people." Some parents think that letting their child get used to alcohol at a young age will develop responsible drinking habits and protect him/her from future alcohol problems. In fact, the exact opposite is true: kids who start using alcohol before age 15 are actually *five times* more likely to have alcohol-related problems later in life.³³ It's troubling, then, that 40% of kids report that they get free alcohol from adults, some of whom are their own parents.³⁴ In one suburban Connecticut town, a third of high school students reported that they obtained alcohol with their parents' permission.¹ Likewise, in one Chicago-based survey, a third of 12-year-olds that had tried alcohol said their parents had provided their first drink.³⁵

MYTH 5: If I forbid alcohol use, it will only make my child want to drink more. So should I even bother trying to stop it?

The answer is "Absolutely, yes." Parents tend to underestimate the influence they can have on their children's drinking. In addition, there is a lot of evidence that setting limits—even expectations of "no use" (abstinence)—in terms of underage drinking *reduces*, rather than increases, alcohol use. It's not often that you get so much "bang for the buck" in terms of parenting, so take advantage of it.

If you're afraid you'll make alcohol a "forbidden fruit" by expecting abstinence from your son or daughter, consider the many demonstrated positive effects of no-use policies, which far outweigh any potential negative effects. Kids who report learning a lot from their parents about the risks of



The take-home message:

With any given underage drinker, it's difficult to predict whether s/he will or won't have alcohol problems later in life; the risk is very real for *all* youth who drink. Underage drinking is more like a game of Russian Roulette than a harmless "rite of passage." Call it the downside of young people's incredible ability to learn—underage drinking can permanently alter kids' brains and may put them on a path toward addiction, even if there is no family history of alcoholism. While it's legal to allow your underage child to drink under your supervision, think about whether the risks are worth it. It may be difficult to say "no" to your teen now, but remember that underage drinking may cause a lot of regrets later, for both you and your son and daughter.

substance use are up to *half* as likely to use drugs or alcohol.³⁶ Young people who know their parents would disapprove of substance use are also less likely to use drugs and alcohol.⁷ In fact, parental disapproval is the key reason children who do *not* drink give for their decision to avoid alcohol.³⁷ And don't forget all the other supportive things you do as a parent—youth who eat regular meals with their families are less likely to engage in risky behaviors, including alcohol use.³⁶ In Connecticut, high-school students are much less likely to binge drink if they see their families as loving and supportive and if their parents keep track of their whereabouts.²

It's true that zero-tolerance or "one-strike-and-you're-out" approaches tend to backfire with kids. Adolescents, no

matter what the issue, don't respond well to harsh punishments or being treated as if adults have given up on them. The same goes for "preachy" approaches. In general, a cold, inflexible parenting style (think "boot camp") may actually *increase* the likelihood of youth alcohol use.³⁸

Instead, what seems to work better in terms of preventing underage drinking is a parenting strategy that sets a clear no-use policy, but is flexible enough to allow kids to make a few mistakes, experience consequences, and learn from them. If you've successfully set limits about other issues with your son or daughter, and if you and your teen enjoy a close relationship, you're halfway there. The goal with limit-setting around alcohol use is to be as loving as you are firm—in other words, making rules not just for rules' sake, but with the motivation of care and concern. Also, if your son or daughter is involved in setting the rules, he or she is much more likely to accept and follow them.

Sometimes natural consequences—hangovers, oversleeping and missing a test, being kicked off a sports team, getting a fine and drivers' license suspension for alcohol possession—result from underage drinking, and it's important to allow these consequences to happen. Think about the message that could be communicated if parents encourage their child to avoid taking responsibility, or even blame others for "unfairly targeting" their child. If natural consequences don't change your son or daughter's behavior, consider taking away privileges or an allowance, or adding extra responsibilities to make up for property damage or harm caused to others. Making sure kids understand the consequences ahead of time will make it much easier to enforce rules when needed. Praising your son or daughter for having made the right choice is also worth its weight in gold when it comes to preventing future drinking.

So back to the "forbidden fruit" argument for a moment. You may be thinking, what about countries outside the United States, where minimum drinking ages may not exist or may not be enforced, and where kids try alcohol at young ages with their parents' blessing? Isn't that an effective way of reducing underage drinking? According to a study that compared 15- and 16-year-olds' binge drinking rates in the U.S. versus 19 European countries, the answer is "no." With the exception of Turkey, every European country reported a higher youth binge-drinking rate than the United States.³³ As of 2008, France (a society that many view as promoting responsible, moderate alcohol use starting at a young age) was actually planning to ban sales of alcohol to



What if my son or daughter gets annoyed when I try to talk about alcohol?

When discussing alcohol, try to let your son or daughter do as much talking as you, and make sure to listen without interrupting. Afterwards, try to end the conversation with an "open" statement such as:

- How are you feeling (what are you thinking), now that we've talked about it?
- Come to me anytime you want to talk about it again, OK?

Don't be deterred by his or her eye-rolling or assume your son or daughter hasn't heard you. Teens may act as if they don't care what you say, but here's the secret they don't want you to know—they really are listening. A student from Connecticut's Haddam-Killingworth High School put it best when she said, "There's what we want, and there's what we need. It's a parent's job to know what we really need. It's what we'll thank them for in the long run."

If you don't feel the conversation ended on the best note, don't worry. Another teachable moment will arise soon enough, maybe at a time when your son or daughter will more actively participate in the discussion.

minors, in order to cope with an increasing youth binge drinking problem. Between 2004 and 2007, France experienced a 50% increase in youth hospitalized for excessive alcohol use, and alcohol is the leading cause of death among French youth.³⁹

your advantage—by putting limits in place regarding underage drinking, you'll send the right message to your son or daughter about following the law. Even more importantly, you'll send the message that you care about him or her.

In their own words...

A 14-year-old high-school student from a suburban Connecticut town shares how his parents handle discussions about alcohol use.

What's the most important thing your parents told you about alcohol use?

They know alcohol's everywhere, but they make it clear that drugs and alcohol are bad—they pound that idea in.

How have your parents' discussions with you affected your decision about whether to drink?

I choose not to drink because of it.

If you could give parents advice on how they should handle the issue of drinking with kids, what would you say?

Parents cannot be too strict or too lazy—they need to find a happy medium. They should talk to kids where there are no distractions—family dinners are a great place. We usually talk about alcohol whenever my parents see something about it in the news or hear about it from another parent in town.

In the United States, the minimum legal drinking age (MLDA) of 21 is in place for all 50 states, and for good reason. You already know that kids lack the physical or psychological maturity to handle the effects of alcohol. Did you also know that legal access to alcohol at age 18 is associated with *increased*, not decreased, drinking later in life?⁴⁰ Since 1984, when the drinking age in most states was raised from 18 to 21, youth under age 21 have drunk less and continued to drink less through their early 20s. In addition, the involvement of drinking drivers age 20 and younger in fatal car crashes has declined by 59% since the MLDA was set; the law saves an estimated 900 young lives a year in terms of traffic deaths alone.⁴⁰ Use these protective benefits to

party where minors were drinking in front of parents.⁴¹ Remember, however, that in 2006 in Connecticut, it became illegal to allow parties where minors drink—even for party hosts who don't directly provide the alcohol. You may have seen media coverage of adults who've been arrested under this "social host" law. Remember also that while it is legal to

Now you may be wondering: as a responsible parent, couldn't I allow youth to drink in a "controlled" setting—say, allowing alcohol use at a party, but taking kids' car keys so they can't drive? Youth tell us that this happens regularly—in fact, one in four teens reports having attended a

party where minors were drinking in front of parents.⁴¹ Remember, however, that in 2006 in Connecticut, it became illegal to allow parties where minors drink—even for party hosts who don't directly provide the alcohol. You may have seen media coverage of adults who've been arrested under this "social host" law. Remember also that while it is legal to allow your own child to drink in your presence, it is illegal to allow *others'* kids to use alcohol.

Where parties are concerned, keep in mind that teens have a particular talent for side-stepping adult rules. Consider whether an adult can really "supervise" underage drinkers. Think about it: Could the parents of other youth hold you liable if their child was injured, or worse? If allowed to engage in illegal underage



drinking, do even the best-intentioned teens have the maturity and judgment to limit their alcohol intake? Who knows what and how much a youth may have drunk before arriving at a party? Could a teen drink enough to need medical attention? Unless a host were hovering over partygoers every minute, could he or she really prevent the potential

risk for car crashes due to the distractions of drunk, rowdy passengers.

As your child's primary role model, you're in a perfect position to demonstrate your family values concerning alcohol, whether that means not drinking at all, or using

alcohol responsibly only when you're 21 or older. Kids are exposed to so many messages (even from adults) that present alcohol use as an essential part of growing up; they should know that if they choose not to drink, this can also be rewarding. Think about the flip side of the youth drinking statistics—for example, if two out of three Connecticut high school seniors drink, then *one in three does not*. Our hope is that your child will be that one in three. If so, s/he will need your support in feeling "normal" and in connecting with other peers for whom abstinence is typical. If you're wondering whether you're doing the right thing, remember that youth who drink are over seven times more likely to use illicit

drugs, especially if they started drinking at a young age.⁴⁰ Meanwhile, high-schoolers who abstain from experimenting with substances are better-adjusted and continue to be so through their early 20s.⁴²

violent incidents, unsafe/unwanted sexual activity, or property damage that often occur with underage drinkers? What if a party guest had taken prescription or illicit substances before drinking and experienced a dangerous drug interaction? Even youth "designated drivers" are at



The take-home message:

The evidence is very clear. The more you can do to prevent underage drinking, whether in a party setting or under any other circumstances, the safer and healthier your child will be now *and* as an adult. Obeying the law is just the first of many good reasons to set firm limits. Prevention is absolutely within your reach as a parent, and don't be afraid to send a clear abstinence message. Underage drinking is not inevitable, nor is it an experience that's essential to growing up. A parenting approach that's loving, fair and flexible—and encourages your son or daughter to be accountable for his/her actions—can provide a lifetime of benefits for your child.

Talking With Your Child About Alcohol Use and “Parenting for Prevention”

Why do youth use alcohol?

The most obvious answer is that alcohol is easily ingested, inexpensive, widely available and obtained legally (at least for those 21 and over). In addition, The Partnership for a Drug-Free America and the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) suggest a variety of factors that may make youth more likely to engage in underage drinking—examples are listed below. Consider the influence you might have as a parent on each of these factors.

Community and Societal

- Easy social and retail access to alcohol (easy to buy or find in someone's home)
- Poor enforcement of underage drinking laws
- Media glamorization or portrayal of drinking without negative consequences

Individual

- Believing that drinking isn't very harmful
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) or other disorders
- Rebelliousness, frequent breaking of rules

Peer

- Friends whose social lives revolve around partying
- Friends who begin drinking at an early age (10-12 years old)
- Rigid clique structure in which “fitting in” is very important

Family

- Family members with a history of addiction
- Low parental supervision
- Daily, serious family conflict

School

- Academic difficulties beginning in elementary school
- Having a learning disability
- Feeling disconnected and unsupported at school

As discussed in the previous section, one teen may feel compelled to use alcohol to escape from problems, to cope with stress, or to reduce social anxiety, while another may find his/her way to drinking simply through a combination of boredom, unsupervised time, and a home stocked with unsecured alcohol. It's important to pay attention to your son or daughter's unique environment and the risks it may pose.



When should I start discussing alcohol? How should the conversation change as my child gets older?

As long as the discussion is developmentally appropriate, there is no age too young to begin talking about how your child takes care of his or her body. Remember that talking about the issue of alcohol before there is an *immediate need* to discuss the subject will make it much easier to bring up this topic once your child reaches the age when first experimentation often occurs. For young children (kindergarten through second grade), talking about alcohol can be tied to discussions about other safety and wellness measures—eating healthy, wearing a seatbelt, not touching a hot stove, etc. One good example is medicine—it can help

you when you're sick, but it can be harmful if you don't have a doctor's and parent's permission to take it, if you take too much, or if you don't have the illness that the medicine is supposed to help. Another example for younger kids could be a bar of soap—great for its intended use, which is cleaning the outside of your body, but will hurt if it gets in your eyes or make you ill if swallowed. Likewise, a developmentally appropriate explanation of the intended use for alcoholic beverages might be “only a little,” only by adults, and never before driving. When adults drink too much alcohol, it can make them “dizzy” and sick. When younger people drink alcohol, it is even more dangerous and could result in hurting one's brain (the most important part of your body).

Elementary school age

More serious discussion should begin *no later than third grade* and continue through college. *Make sure to securely store any alcohol in your home from this age onward.* Just as with any other risky behavior, talking about underage drinking once is definitely not enough. Rather than planning “a talk,” think about how you can weave the topic into a series of everyday, ongoing conversations. Talk about underage drinking while you're eating dinner or riding in the car. Media coverage of incidents, alcohol advertising and movies are great for sparking conversation, as are family members who may have experienced negative consequences from alcohol misuse or abuse. Don't make



Did YOU drink when you were a teenager?

If a parent or guardian drank as a teen, this can be an awkward question. Avoiding the question can lower your credibility with your son or daughter. On the other hand, sharing too much information may glamorize underage drinking. You don't need to share every detail. Stress the fact that you want to focus on your teen, not your own past behavior. You can note that the laws were different back then, in addition to our level of scientific knowledge about the effects of alcohol on young brains. Share any regrets you may have without being too heavy-handed. Remind your child that because you care about his/her safety, your expectation is no drinking before age 21.

conversations something that you or your child dreads. Discussions don't have to be—and shouldn't be—long. Sometimes they may consist simply of a few comments you exchange after observing something in the surrounding environment.

By *fifth grade*, your son or daughter should understand very clearly that you don't want him or her to drink before age 21. S/he should be able to list reasons for not drinking as well as your family's rules regarding alcohol. Reiterate these from time to time, especially during the transition to the middle-school grades.

Middle school age

As kids head into *sixth grade*, discussions should begin to offer opportunities for talking about the child's actual behavior, since first experimentation with alcohol is most common during the middle-school years. For example, parents can ask, “Have you ever been in a situation where alcohol was available or offered?” or “Have you ever felt like your friends expected you to drink?” Anticipate your son or daughter's possible reactions, questions or disclosures. For example, what would you say if your child:

- Thinks it's funny or “stupid” that you've brought up the topic?
- Mentions having tried alcohol?
- Mentions his/her friends' drinking habits?

- Mentioned having felt pressured or uncomfortable around drinking peers?
- Asks if you drank as a teen?

At this age, e-mailing, text messaging and “tweeting” are great ways to use young people’s preferred methods of communication to reinforce not only your expectations, but also your care and concern.

Because the conversation becomes more sensitive as your son or daughter gets older, it might also help to have a few discussion-opening, non-judgmental responses ready, such as:

- It sounds like you had to make an important choice.
- I’m worried about you being in a situation like that.
- I’m glad you told me. Let’s talk about it.
- How did you feel when your friends did that?
- Let’s plan some things you can do if you’re in that situation again.
- How do you think you can avoid that situation in the future?

Make sure to focus on *skills* you’d like your child to develop—for example, avoiding risky situations, removing oneself from risky situations, and declining alcohol in the midst of risky situations. Rather than simply imposing your ideas, make sure your son or daughter has chosen his/her preferred method for dealing with all of these scenarios. It also doesn’t hurt to practice or role-play a bit. Even if your child thinks it’s silly, s/he’ll be more likely to remember and use these techniques in the future.

Another effective way of communicating expectations concerning alcohol is asking your son or daughter to help you draft a family motto or “mission statement.” This activity can open discussion about why avoiding alcohol use reflects not only respect for the law, but also family values of safety, wellness and personal responsibility.

High school age

As your child enters high school, your conversations should become more mature—making very clear your family’s reasons for avoiding any alcohol use before age 21, such as:

- Underage drinking is illegal, and increasingly, parents and youth face consequences for breaking the law;
- The Minimum Legal Drinking Age (MLDA) of 21 is proven to save young lives; and



- We know a lot more now about how drinking at a young age permanently damages young brains and increases the risk for alcoholism even if there is no family history of addiction.

Your son or daughter should also be aware of laws regarding underage drinking (see “**What legal issues should I be concerned about when it comes to underage drinking?**” later in this guide), how alcohol affects one’s ability to drive, how medications and caffeine can interact with alcohol, how slowly the body metabolizes alcohol, the dangers of drinking games and how alcohol poisoning can occur, how alcoholism develops, and how alcohol use during the teen years can permanently affect brain functioning.



For more information...

[All aspects of alcohol](#)

[Alcohol’s effect on driving ability](#)

[Alcohol and medications](#)

[Alcohol and caffeine](#)

[How the body processes alcohol](#)

[Alcohol poisoning](#)

[Development of alcoholism](#)

[Alcohol and the teen brain](#)

The above links to online resources are available at www.preventionworksct.org/parentguide.



Be careful to balance these “danger” messages with messages of caring and support, such as:

- I don't want you to get hurt;
- I know how important your friends are to you (avoid criticizing his/her friends), and I don't want *them* to get hurt;
- I am here to help if you ever feel like you need alcohol to deal with stress or anxiety;
- Your life goals deserve your full attention;
- I want you to be able to use your full talents; and
- To me (and I hope to you as well) the “cool” teen is one who's strong enough to make decisions based on his/her values and beliefs, rather than simply what the crowd is doing.



They're more clever than you think...

During the high-school years, it's natural for teens to pull away from their parents to assert their independence. This may mean that your son or daughter stops sharing every detail of his/her life and may even deliberately lie or hide the truth to try out “adult” behaviors. Consider these [helpful insights](#) into teen dishonesty.

Make sure to set some mutual expectations regarding the following:

- Consequences that will occur if rules are broken (consequences should be clearly spelled out and can even be written into a “contract” that you and your child sign);

- Never driving after consuming alcohol, riding with someone who has consumed alcohol, or transporting intoxicated passengers;
- Calling 911 if a friend has passed out from intoxication;
- Calling home if a no-questions-asked ride home is needed (you may want to develop a “code word” so that your child can easily escape a dangerous situation);
- Confirming plans with parents in advance—where s/he'll be, with whom, and at what time s/he'll be home;
- Attending or hosting parties only if underage drinking is prohibited; and
- Your son or daughter earning trust in proportion to the amount of responsible behavior demonstrated.

At this age, youth are likely to make some observable mistakes with alcohol use. Even if you've written down rules and consequences, it will help to keep conversations flexible—be prepared to leave the discussion for another time if the conversation is turning into an argument or your child is “tuning out.” In addition, it may be useful to plan your responses to the following situations:

- Your son or daughter mentions having been drunk;
- S/he is caught drinking by you or another adult;
- S/he comes home intoxicated;
- You discover s/he has told lies in order to drink;
- S/he obtains alcohol from an older sibling or friend; or
- S/he mentions being concerned about the effects of his/her own or a peer's drinking.

Think about it:

- What will you say, and how will you say it?
- How will your monitoring of him/her change?
- What behaviors will you need to see in your child so that s/he can earn back your trust?
- If your child's friends and/or his or her parents in some way facilitated the underage drinking, how will you handle the situation?
- What skills will you teach so that your teen makes a better decision next time? For example, does s/he have a preferred method of declining peers' offers of alcohol?
- How will you communicate your care and concern even though you are disappointed with his/her behavior?

Does your child's pediatrician screen for alcohol abuse?

Many pediatricians use a screening tool called CRAFT⁴³ that helps them identify teens who are at high risk for alcohol problems. Make sure to ask your pediatrician if he/she uses this tool and whether he/she makes an effort to identify and counsel youth who may be abusing alcohol and other substances.

The **CRAFT** asks the following questions:

C - Have you ever ridden in a **CAR** driven by someone (including yourself) who was "high" or had been using alcohol or drugs?

R - Do you ever use alcohol or drugs to **RELAX**, feel better about yourself, or fit in?

A - Do you ever use alcohol/drugs while you are by yourself, **ALONE**?

F - Do you ever **FORGET** things you did while using alcohol or drugs?

F - Do your family or **FRIENDS** ever tell you that you should cut down on your drinking or drug use?

T - Have you gotten into **TROUBLE** while you were using alcohol or drugs?



Answering "yes" to two or more questions is associated with substance-related problems or disorders in youth age 14-18. Keep in mind that these questions are designed to be asked by a professional. Young people may provide more honest answers to a physician, and your child's doctor may be better equipped to respond to "yes" answers. Screening for possible alcohol abuse is therefore one more good reason to make sure your son or daughter visits the pediatrician at least once a year.

During these years, it will be important to stick to your family rules (especially when it comes to parties); monitor and verify your son or daughter's whereabouts; set limits on driving that are consistent with "graduated licensing" laws; keep tabs on his/her Internet and cell phone use (make sure to become your child's "friend" on social networking sites, such as Facebook, that s/he uses); continue to use e-mail, text messaging and "tweeting" to stay connected to him/her; keep him/her busy with positive activities; and continue to express care and concern.



Learn about teen drivers and graduated licensing laws

The above link to online resources is available at www.preventionworksct.org/parentguide.

Periodically take stock of any (secured) alcohol in your home so that you'd know if any were missing. Another environmental factor to be careful about is exposure to movies that glamorize alcohol use, as well as alcohol advertising and promotional items. Think carefully before allowing your son or daughter to own alcohol-related brand/logo T-shirts, hats, shot glasses or other items, which are associated with greater likelihood of underage drinking.⁴⁴ If your high-schooler has a college-age sibling, and/or one 21 or older, be especially careful. Young adult males are some of the most common sources of alcohol for underage drinkers.⁴⁵ Consider whether you will allow kids of different age groups to participate in the same group social activities.



If you're having trouble setting and maintaining limits, family therapy may help you to re-establish control and re-connect with your teen. Parenting a teen is harder now than ever—don't be ashamed of seeking support. Likewise, if you believe your son or daughter is developing a problem with alcohol, seek help *as soon as possible*. Waiting to verify that the problem is serious, or until your child agrees s/he has a problem, only allows more time for addiction to develop. Alcoholism develops in stages, and intervention is possible at every stage, whether that means counseling related to concerns about risk behaviors or treatment for full-blown alcohol dependence. Familiarize yourself with local counseling and treatment options in advance. (For more information, see "**What if I suspect or already know my child has a problem with alcohol?**" later in this guide).



Tips for safe teen parties...

When your teen attends a party:

- Talk to the hosting parent(s) to ensure that alcohol will not be served.
- Be wary if your son or daughter makes last-minute changes in plans or asks to "sleep over."
- Set a curfew.
- Arrange safe transportation to and from the party (be available if needed).
- Be awake when your teen arrives home so that you can observe any signs of alcohol use.

When your teen hosts a party:

- Secure any alcohol that may be in your home.
- Make sure that guests stay in a designated area of your home.
- Monitor the designated area often to make sure that alcohol is not consumed.
- Limit the number of guests, know who is invited, and maintain a "no-crashing" policy.
- Do not permit guests to leave and then return to the party.
- Notify parents and/or police if teens arrive at the party under the influence of alcohol.



Do you know if your child's school does the following?

- Regularly administers an anonymous student survey to determine the prevalence of alcohol and drug use and to monitor the effectiveness of prevention efforts.
- Partners with local law enforcement—for example, working with a school resource officer (SRO) to detect and prevent underage drinking parties.
- Participates in a community coalition with a mission to prevent underage drinking.
- Lists substance-related policies in the student handbook and shares them with parents.
- Prohibits underage drinking among student athletes.
- Consistently addresses student rule violations related to underage drinking.
- Provides training for all staff, including counseling staff, in evidence-based prevention of underage drinking.
- Designates a staff team (e.g., a Student Assistance Team) that coordinates early intervention for student social, emotional and behavioral concerns, including underage alcohol use.
- Offers special outreach and supports for vulnerable student populations such as students with addicted parents.
- Maintains active referral relationships with community providers of adolescent substance abuse treatment.
- Works with students following treatment to re-integrate them into the school environment.
- Offers student “insight groups” that address alcohol and drug use, such as a student recovery group.
- Offers student clubs and activism opportunities related to prevention of underage drinking, including peer-to-peer mentoring and Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD).
- Integrates discussions about the dangers and consequences of alcohol use into K-12 health and wellness curricula.
- Balances “danger” messages about alcohol with an effective curriculum for building *skills and competencies* that will help students avoid alcohol use (for example, Botvin's Life Skills).
- Periodically engages the entire school, including parents, in prevention activities (e.g, student-parent forums on underage drinking, offering parents tips on preventing underage drinking).
- Partners with the community to provide alcohol-free prom and graduation celebrations.

College age

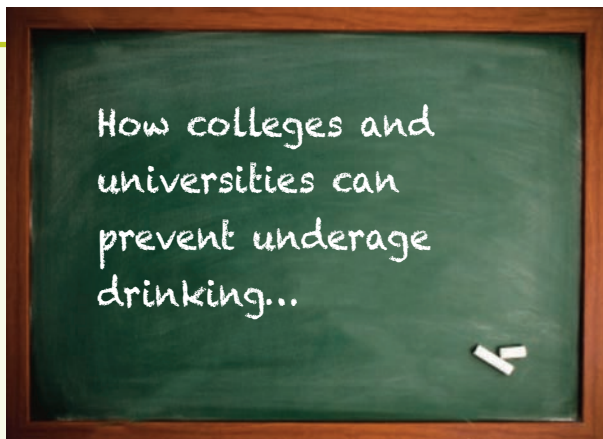
Sending your child off to college is a big transition. With few adult responsibilities and more choices about how to spend free time, the son or daughter you've been able to monitor closely during high school will now experience new temptations. Remember that the risk of heavy drinking increases when a young person attends college, with freshman year being a particularly vulnerable time. The challenge at this age is allowing age-appropriate independence while encouraging your child to stay safe in his/her new environment. Your prevention efforts should begin when you are helping your son or daughter select a college. Some things to consider when making this decision include:

- On-campus housing may be better monitored and therefore safer than off-campus housing (some colleges and universities also offer alcohol-free housing).
- Campuses that place a large emphasis on athletics and



Greek life (especially those with Greek-only housing) tend to have higher levels of student binge drinking.⁴⁶

- Colleges and universities with security staff who are local police officers (as opposed to “public safety” personnel) may be better equipped to enforce underage drinking policies.



Do you know if your son or daughter's college campus does the following?

- Devotes a full-time staff member to substance-abuse prevention.
- Offers counseling staff with expertise in treatment of substance abuse and dependence.
- Offers a coordinated system of screening, intervention and treatment referral for students with alcohol problems (e.g., SBIRT - Screening, Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment).
- Offers a consistent process for re-integrating students who are in recovery from addiction.
- Regularly administers an anonymous alcohol and drug survey to students (e.g., the CORE) to determine the prevalence of alcohol and drug use and monitor the effectiveness of prevention efforts. (Viewing the results of such a survey over several years will indicate whether prevention has been effective on campus—ask whether this information is available to parents.)
- Discourages binge drinking by scheduling Friday-morning classes and training faculty to promote healthy choices among students.
- Provides adequate training to Resident Assistants in detecting and responding to underage drinking.
- Provides special outreach and supports for freshmen (e.g., peer-to-peer mentoring).
- Provides mandatory alcohol education for all incoming students.
- Specifies alcohol-related policies such as:
 - The disciplinary/judicial process (including possible mandatory counseling and/or education) for students violating alcohol rules;
 - The circumstances under which an ambulance will be called to transport intoxicated students;
 - Whether students obtaining help for an intoxicated friend are granted “immunity” from judicial sanctions; and
 - Whether parents will be notified following student violations of alcohol rules.
- Offers alcohol-free dorms and activities.
- Provides safe transportation to students in emergency situations.
- Partners with local police to conduct party patrols and conduct enforcement activities in off-campus housing areas.
- Participates in a campus-community coalition to prevent underage drinking.
- Makes alcohol prevention efforts visible on campus (e.g., posters with messages such as “Most students here do not binge drink”).
- Campuses that make visible efforts to partner with the surrounding community (e.g., with a campus-community coalition, “town and gown” committee, partnership between campus and community police and/or partnership between campus and landlords of off-campus housing) tend to take prevention of underage drinking more seriously.⁴⁷
- Colleges and universities that have expressed support for [lowering the drinking age](#) may have mixed feelings about the value of underage drinking prevention (remember, however, that there is good evidence for the positive effects of the Minimum Legal Drinking Age of 21).
- Campuses surrounded by a large number of bars and liquor stores offer more opportunity for underage drinking, especially if these establishments are allowed to advertise cheap drink specials on campus or in the college newspaper.⁴⁶
- Campuses that allow alcohol at sporting events or kegs for university events may not strongly enforce underage drinking policies.

Once your child has settled into college life, it will help to:

- Encourage your college-age student to seek out entertainment options beyond partying—campuses frequently offer alcohol-free activities. Activities that benefit others (e.g., serving as a mentor to a high school student, getting involved in a local community service project) are another great use of time, as are internships and part-time jobs that build career skills.
- Discuss how a healthy balance can be established between academic focus and socializing.
- Together, plan some new strategies that your son or daughter can use for [declining alcohol in social situations](#).

- Check in regarding how your child is getting along with his/her roommate and whether the two of them share the same values when it comes to alcohol use.
- Discuss how s/he would handle a situation in which a friend or acquaintance was drunk and/or passed-out.
- Since options like “grounding” will no longer be feasible, identify new, age-appropriate consequences that will result if you discover that your son or daughter has broken family rules about underage drinking while away at college.
- As your child gets older, focus less on consequences and more on encouraging him/her to initiate counseling or other assistance in order to stop drinking. If he or she is 21 or older and engaging in high-risk drinking, focus on reducing the amount of alcohol consumed in order to reduce potential harm—spacing out drinks, making sure to eat, avoiding “drinking to get drunk,” etc.
- Set expectations regarding how your son or daughter will celebrate his or her 21st birthday—this occasion often involves dangerous “competitive drinking.”
- Re-negotiate rules when your son or daughter returns home during college breaks. S/he may see reunions with high-school friends as an opportunity to catch up on partying, and holidays are known high-risk times for dangerous binge drinking as well as drinking and driving.⁴⁸



- Consider whether you will allow your child to travel to a college-student “hot spot” during spring break. These party environments pose a particular risk for underage and high-risk drinking.⁴⁹
- If you discover that your child has gotten into trouble for underage alcohol use while at college, work with college staff to help your son or daughter understand the impact of his/her actions. Remember that protecting youth from the “natural consequences” of underage drinking can send the wrong message. Encourage him/her to seek counseling services if you have serious concerns. Find out if **BASICS**—a preventive intervention proven effective with a college-age population—is available.

Laws relevant to colleges and universities...

The **Drug-Free Schools and Campuses Act** requires colleges and universities to:

- Provide prevention programming that is based on current theory and research.
- Provide students and employees with annual, written notification of: (1) standards of conduct, (2) disciplinary sanctions for violations, (3) the health risks associated with substance use, (4) available prevention/treatment programs, and (5) possible legal sanctions and penalties (local/state).
- Provide a written review of their programs, policies and procedures every other year.

Consider one [parent's view](#) of colleges' and universities' compliance with this law. Access information that your son or daughter's college or university provides regarding alcohol policies, and try to determine whether these are enforced. Students tend to drink more at campuses without firm rules in place.

The **Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act** requires colleges and universities to disclose annual information about campus crime and security policies. The act requires, among other things:

- Publishing an annual report disclosing campus security policies and three year's worth of selected crime statistics, including liquor-law violations resulting in arrest or disciplinary referral.

Access the latest report to look up the number of liquor-law violations. Keep in mind that campuses with good enforcement may report a high number of alcohol-related incidents; a campus with no reported violations may not be taking the matter seriously. On the other hand, if the number of violations has remained high for many years in a row, this may indicate that current prevention measures are ineffective.



What legal issues should I be concerned about when it comes to underage drinking?

Underage drinking is a concern not only because of risks it poses to your child's safety, but also because of its legal ramifications. Here is a summary of Connecticut laws that apply to underage drinking.

LAWS	PENALTIES
Hosting an Underage Drinking Party	Fine for first offense and court appearance for second/subsequent offenses, with penalties including fines and possible jail time.
Providing Alcohol to Minors	Court appearance for any offense, with penalties including fines and possible jail time.
Risk of Injury to a Minor	Court appearance for any offense, with penalties including fines and possible jail time.
Minor in Possession	<p>Fine and automatic driver's license suspension*</p> <p>Possession in a vehicle: 90-day suspension</p> <p>Possession on public property: 60-day suspension</p> <p>Possession on private property: 30-day suspension</p>
Youth DUI	Court appearance with penalties including possible jail time, fines, and suspension of the minor's driver's license for one year.*
Misrepresenting Age to Obtain Alcohol	Court appearance for any offense, with penalties including fines, possible jail time, and a suspension of the minor's driver's license.*

* Minors can attend a "Per Se" hearing at the Department of Motor Vehicles to contest the license suspension.

With these laws and penalties in mind, consider the following scenarios that parents and teens face when underage drinking occurs.

Scenario 1:

Mr. and Mrs. Smith's teen, Tyler, is having a post-prom party, and they are happy to host, to ensure everyone is safe and off the road. When the Smiths go down to check on the party guests before bed, they notice the teens are drinking alcohol that they did not supply. Stunned, they call Tyler over to explain how the teens got the alcohol. He said one of his friends brought it over, but it's cool, they can handle the situation. Hesitant, the Smiths wonder if they should call all of the parents to come and get their kids. Tyler pleads with the parents to go back to bed, and tells them it's better than being out in the woods. The Smiths agree, and head up to bed. An hour later the teens are spilling out into the lawn, screaming obscenities. A patrol cop sees the ruckus, and comes over to scope out the situation. Once he realizes the teens are in possession of alcohol, he calls for backup to safely disperse the party. **Are Mr. and Mrs. Smith in trouble? How about Tyler?**



Answer:

The police will do their best to trace the alcohol back to the source. Seeing as how Mr. and Mrs. Smith did not provide the alcohol, they can't be charged with delivering alcohol to minors. They *can* be charged with hosting an underage drinking party because they knowingly allowed minors to possess alcohol and didn't make a reasonable attempt to stop the minors from possessing. Tyler can also be charged with hosting, at the officer's discretion, and he, like the other party guests, will be charged as a minor in possession.

Scenario 2:

Mr. Jones is away on vacation, and he leaves his 18-year-old daughter Amaya at home, since she is a bright, responsible girl. Amaya calls a few friends to come over for a movie night, and before she knows what's happened, word spreads that she's having a party without adult supervision. Soon the house is filled with 45 kids, some of whom she barely knows. Several party guests decide to raid the fridge and liquor cabinet to "get the party started." A patrol officer notices cars parked on both sides of the road, creating a hazard. He knocks on the door, and asks to come inside. While there, he notices a young teen unconscious in the corner, and calls for medical assistance. He also calls fellow officers to help disperse the party once he realizes most of the guests are intoxicated. He asks for the person in charge and Amaya steps forward. She says it is her house, and her father is away. **Who's responsible?**

**Answer:**

Since Mr. Jones is out of town and had no idea the party was happening, he cannot be charged with hosting an underage drinking party. Amaya will be charged with both hosting a party and possessing alcohol. She can also be charged with risk of injury to a minor because of the teen passed out in the living room.

Scenario 3:

The Bakers are having a graduation party for their 17-year-old son Ethan. Mr. Baker goes down to the local package store and gets a few kegs. Given that he's collected the kids' car keys, he doesn't see a problem with letting the recent grads celebrate with a few "cold ones" in a controlled environment. After a few hours, the music gets a little loud and neighbors call to complain. When the police come out to tell the homeowner to turn the music down, they see teens consuming beer on the front porch. Unknown to Mr. and Mrs. Baker (who were on the opposite end of their large house while the party was going on), Ethan's friend Joe used an extra set of car keys, left the party and drove to pick up another teen. On his way, Joe, who had consumed four beers, got into an accident.

Who faces legal ramifications?

Answer:

Mr. and Mrs. Baker can be charged with providing alcohol to a minor, hosting an underage drinking party and risk of injury to a minor. Ethan and his fellow grads will be charged with possession of alcohol by minors. Joe will likely be charged with Youth DUI and lose his license for a year. In addition, Joe's parents (who did not know that alcohol would be served at the party) will probably take legal action against Mr. and Mrs. Baker.

Scenario 4:

High-school sophomores Chris and Dawan are driving home from their football game. Chris runs a stop sign and is immediately pulled over by a policeman who is running radar. When the police officer walks over to the car he sees a 30-pack of beer in the back seat. The box and bottles are sealed. **Do the boys get in trouble for transporting alcohol?**

Answer:

Yes. It is illegal for minors to have alcohol in their cars. The penalty can include an infraction for minors possessing alcohol, and can result in a driver's license suspension for 90 days.

Scenario 5:

Twenty-year-old Janelle is at a house party, and after one beer decides to drive her intoxicated friends back to their houses. Along the way Janelle is stopped for speeding. The police officer smells alcohol on her breath and performs the field sobriety test. Although she passes most of the test, Janelle admits that she drank and is sent downtown with the officer to provide a breath sample. Her blood alcohol concentration (BAC) is .02 (less than .08).

Can Janelle still be charged?

Answer:

Yes. Connecticut has a zero-tolerance policy for anyone under the age of 21. A driver under the age of 18 will have his/her driver's license automatically suspended for a year, following any BAC of .02 or higher. Offenders may also be required to pay fines and attend alcohol education programs and/or victim impact panels.

Scenario 6:

Brody, age 18, was asked to obtain alcohol for his friend's after-graduation party. Knowing he wasn't old enough to legally purchase alcohol, he decided to use his older (22-year-old) brother's ID. The store clerk immediately detected that the photo did not match the young customer and called 911 for police assistance. **What charge could Brody face?**

Answer:

In Connecticut it is illegal for a minor to misrepresent his/her age by using a fake identification card or someone else's identification card. In this situation Brody could face fines, jail time, and a suspension of his driver's license.

As evident in these realistic scenarios, Connecticut's law enforcement culture has shifted over the past decade to support greater enforcement of underage drinking laws. Following the lead of many towns that passed local ordinances prohibiting the hosting of parties where minors have access to alcohol, a similar "Social Host" state law took effect in 2006.

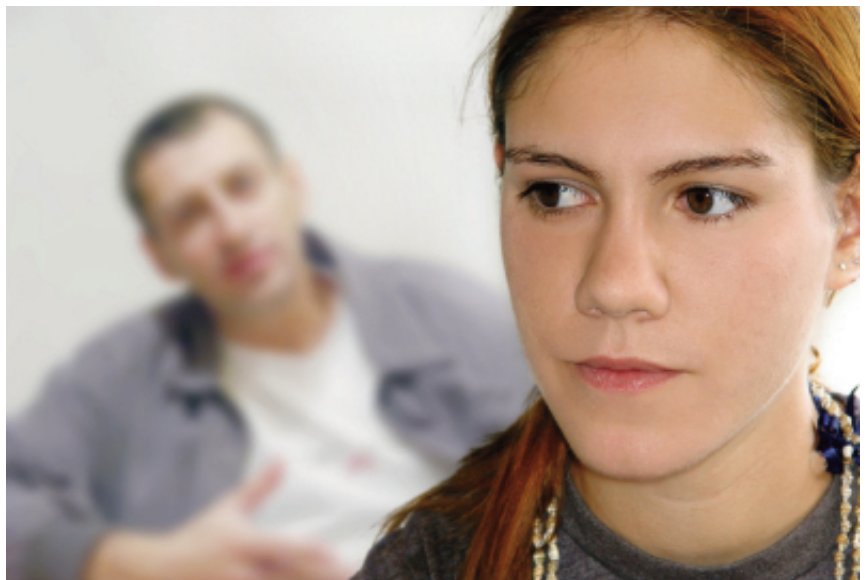
What if I suspect or already know my child has a problem with alcohol?

Partnership for a Drug-Free America provides several warning signs of teen substance abuse which can include changes in family relationships, changes in peer group, disengagement from school and typical activities such as sports or clubs, a drop in grades, unexplained car accidents, preoccupation with going out and partying (often breaking curfew, etc.). If you feel that your child's behavior reflects more than the typical ups and downs of the teen years, you may suspect that alcohol is a factor. If your teen also has had obvious incidents of problematic alcohol use that have gone beyond minor experimentation (i.e., passing out from drinking, purchasing alcohol illegally, keeping a hidden stash of alcohol, drinking alone, lying about his/her plans or whereabouts in order to drink, etc.), *it's time to get help*.

A popular misconception is that an individual needs to "hit rock bottom" before seeking help for his/her alcohol

use. Remember that intervention can be beneficial even in the early stages of use, and that intervention may not involve formal substance abuse treatment. For example, your son or daughter could meet with his/her physician, school social worker, and/or a clergy member to talk things over. If his/her school has a staff team that specializes in early intervention regarding socio-emotional and behavioral concerns (e.g., a Student Assistance Team), consider referring your child. If the school offers an adult-to-youth mentoring program, look into getting a mentor for your son or daughter. Teens tend to agree to these types of interventions fairly easily.

Getting a youth into formal therapy or substance abuse treatment may be more challenging, however. S/he will need to reach a state of readiness before this type of intervention can be effective. "Tough love" approaches risk



alienating young people, especially if they make no effort to build upon personal motivations for seeking help. In talking with your child about going to therapy, try to instead focus on specific behaviors you've observed and the reasons why these worry you. It's not your job to prove that he or she has a problem—only to share your concerns. Make sure to do this when your son or daughter is sober and you're calm. Avoid placing blame and arguing about past behavior. If your son or daughter rejects your request to attend therapy, consider scheduling and attending a session alone, during which you ask for the professional's assistance in increasing your child's readiness.

In Connecticut News...

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Rite of passage? Underage drinking seen as danger

By Jeff Yates, July 24, 2008

With a recent spate of arrests of teens, and parents providing minors with alcohol, police are trying to get the word out that what many see as a "rite of passage" can have dangerous and deadly consequences.

More prevalent in the summer, when college teens are home from school and high school students have more free time, such underage parties may not be what most people envision, said Capt. Michael Lombardo. They aren't a group of friends sitting around watching a baseball game and sharing a few beers, he said. In fact, most of the parties seem to have one thing in common, teens trying to drink as much as they can, as fast as they can, in a competitive atmosphere.

"One thing we run into quite often is the parents are away," he said. "They're out of town, out of the state or even out of the country."

And while in most cases, such as those written up in recent weeks, while police may arrest one individual for serving, and detain 10 or a dozen kids caught in the act, when officers arrive on the scene they are often greeted with the fleeing backs of 20 or more teens running into the woods, he said.

Sometimes the parties are planned out in advance, with 50 or more teens taking part, but also a frequent occurrence is the party that grows out of control, he said.

A teen's parents will go away, and they'll decide to have some friends over. "Word gets out that they're having a small party, a half dozen people, and before they know it, 20 people they didn't invite show up," said Capt. Lombardo. "We've even had kids call the department and say 'Look, I didn't invite all these people. They're drinking, trashing the place. Can you come help get them out?'"

For some reason, whether by luck or because of early education, Wilton has not had a teen drunk driving fatality for as long as Capt. Lombardo can remember, a statistic he hopes remains, as in Ridgefield it seems there's a teen drunk driving death every few years.

"We've been very fortunate in that respect," said Capt. Lombardo. "Hopefully it has been education, that people don't drink and drive."

He said Wilton's officers are known for being "tenacious in traffic enforcement" and "our DUI arrests are very high for a department of our size," which may be part of the reason teens choose to sleep over at a friend's house rather than head out on the road after drinking.

"It's hard to quantify, but I would say we've saved some lives," he said.

Other dangers

But drunk driving should not be the only concern for parents, according to Colleen Fawcett, youth services coordinator.

"I think there's this false sense of security that 'I need to have this under my roof where I can control it,'" among parents, she said. But there are other dangers.

"Underage drinking is one of the most common contributors to criminal behavior, injury, and death among youth," said Ms. Fawcett. "Underage alcohol use can have not only immediate harmful consequences, but also long-range harmful consequences such as increased risk for addiction. Common immediate harm includes alcohol poisoning, car crashes, property damage, community disturbance, violence, unprotected consensual sex, and sexual assault."

The town's Task Force to Reduce Underage Drinking, which began studying what it saw as an alarming trend among Wilton youth in recent years, has been spreading the message of the harmful effects drinking can have on teens. One of the most troubling is the impact of binge drinking on the development of the teen brain, which is still growing and maturing at the same time that teens are becoming involved in drinking.

Laws and lawsuits

One step the task force took to combat teen drinking was the recommendation and passage of the town ordinance on underage drinking on private property.

The ordinance basically allows police officers to enter private property when it is believed that underage drinking is taking place. Before the ordinance, while it was still illegal to provide teens with alcohol, police were limited in some respects on enforcement.

"In order to go into a home, officers have to have probable cause, or what we call exigent circumstances" that there is a real risk, said Capt. Lombardo. "They don't go into the house, they say 'Who's the homeowner.' They're still restricted by the Fourth Amendment."

He said in some cases, parents who are home when an underage party is found can be charged with providing alcohol to minors, but not always. At some parties police have broken up, the parents are asleep in the upstairs bedroom on the second story of a 10,000-square-foot house, while the kids are drinking on the opposite end of the house in the basement, he said. Other times, officers assess the scene and determine there is no way the parents were not aware of the party going on.

"We call it the totality of the circumstance," he said. "They're not looking to make arrests, but they will when they need to, when it's necessary."

Another factor parents should consider, and make clear to their teens, is that along with legal hazards, underage drinking can subject them to lawsuit liability, he said.

If a teen leaves a party after drinking, crashes their car and is killed or injured, or injures someone else, chances are the parent or host is going to get sued, said Capt. Lombardo.

But safety should be the driving concern regardless, and police have seen some pretty unsafe conditions when arriving at some of these parties.

"I remember one year some 13-, 14- and 15-year-olds had a party... and they had hard alcohol," he said, adding police had been tipped off about the party taking place. "We had to take three or four to the hospital."

"Who's to say something wouldn't have happened if we hadn't heard about it?" he said.

Reasons why young people often resist help include:

- Even if they witness the negative consequences of alcohol use in peers or adults, youth often feel invulnerable and believe that what happens to other people will not happen to them.
- Youth often believe that they can control their drinking, and that only individuals with “addictive personalities” are at risk for alcoholism.
- Youths’ identity and self-esteem may be wrapped up in partying, and they may fear the loss of friends or a social life if they don’t drink.

Adding to the challenge of youth who may not be motivated to seek treatment, there is a scarcity of suitable treatment providers for adolescents. In fact, a 2009 Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) study found that over 90% of young adults classified as needing treatment for alcohol or drug use do not receive it, likely due to a combination of their reluctance to enter treatment and having few options for

treatment.⁵⁰ Similarly, few college students who meet the criteria for alcohol abuse or dependence access treatment services, most often because they believe treatment is not necessary (National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2007).⁵¹ For these reasons, it is important for parents to do their homework and prepare themselves for what may be an extended process of obtaining help, especially if the young person is away at college.

While you should try to find out as much as you can about your child’s level of use so that you can choose the right level of help, keep in mind that your son or daughter is unlikely to tell you the whole truth about his/her behavior. If your child is in college, it will be even more difficult to know what’s really going on.



Consider the following youth guide to hiding one’s drinking while at college

The above link to online resources is available at www.preventionworksct.org/parentguide.

Stages of drug and alcohol abuse and recommended parent responses ^{52, 53}

Experimentation – Teens are motivated by curiosity to try alcohol and may drink to get a “buzz” but not become fully intoxicated. This stage is common during adolescence and can be short-lived. Some adolescents, however, will progress to the next level of use. Remember that youth who begin experimenting before age 15 are at higher risk for future alcohol abuse.

Recommended parent action: *It is appropriate for parents to impose consequences and to reiterate a clear expectation of abstinence from underage alcohol use. The longer experimentation can be delayed, the better.*

Use – At this stage, alcohol is used more frequently and begins to become associated with social activities (e.g., use on most or all weekends). A teen may begin “drinking to get drunk.”

Recommended parent action: *Consider bringing your child to meet with a physician, school social worker, clergy member or other trusted role model to discuss concerns. Or, consult a therapist to evaluate family functioning, re-establish family rules and develop clear expectations for parents and children.*

Abuse – In this stage adolescents rely on alcohol to help cope or to aid in socialization. Frequency of use increases and begins to become the focus of the teen’s life. Use persists despite others’ concern and despite negative consequences experienced (drop in grades, being fired from a job, etc.). The adolescent may routinely consume alcohol past the point of intoxication and pass out. For more information, see [formal diagnostic criteria for alcohol abuse](#).

Recommended parent action: *Seek professional treatment for the child, which may include individual and family therapy and/or participation in an intensive outpatient program.*

Dependence – This stage is characterized by addiction, defined as physical withdrawal symptoms, compulsive seeking of alcohol, and inability to control the level/amount of use. For more information, see [formal diagnostic criteria for alcohol dependence](#).

Recommended parent action: *Seek professional treatment for the child. In severe cases, inpatient detoxification will be necessary.*

For these reasons, you should leave screening and diagnosis to a professional. A therapist can administer instruments with proven ability to predict future alcohol problems or diagnose current ones. A clinician also can offer an objective perspective on how your family dynamics—patterns of interacting—may relate to your teen's drinking.

When selecting a professional, you should be aware that licensed alcohol and drug counselors (LADCs) meet the highest (state Department of Public Health) standards for relevant education and experience. Another state-level professional credential is certified alcohol and drug counselor (CADC). Academic degrees for these professionals include licensed clinical social worker (LCSW), social worker (MSW), licensed marriage and family therapist (LMFT) and clinical psychologist (Ph.D.). Individuals with these degrees may have experience in diagnosing and treating substance abuse issues, even if they do not have a specific substance-abuse license or certification.

Once you make a decision about the credentials that are important to you, it will be just as essential for you to find a professional who is a good fit for you and your son or daughter. The professional's experience in treating adolescents may be one factor, in addition to his/her style and treatment philosophy. If you are unsure, your child's physician or counseling staff at his/her school may be able to recommend someone. Ask college counseling staff whether they have specific expertise in substance abuse counseling. If not, it's especially important to ask about the process of referring youth to nearby providers.

A professional therapist will typically request one-to-one sessions with your son or daughter, in addition to joint sessions (with you and your child together). Remember that professional ethics prevent therapists from sharing the content of a youth's sessions with parents, except in cases



where a youth poses an immediate safety threat to self or others. Confidentiality practices are designed to create a safe space for your son or daughter to be honest and to fully benefit from treatment. Any concerns you may have can be addressed in joint sessions.

A therapist can help you with planning next steps—including helping you decrease the likelihood of your teen's further experimentation, helping your son or daughter identify underlying mental health concerns or environmental reasons that may be prompting alcohol use, and strengthening his or her motivation to decrease or stop use. If your son or daughter's problem is severe, a clinician can also work with you to increase his or her readiness for inpatient or outpatient treatment for alcohol dependence.



For further information about getting help...

[Warning Signs of Alcohol and Substance Abuse](#)

[Time to Act](#)

[HBO's "Addiction" Series Guide to Early Onset Alcoholism](#)

[Infoline 211](#)

[Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services Treatment Locator](#)

[Connecticut treatment listings](#)

The above links to online resources are available at www.preventionworksct.org/parentguide.



At the college level, the Brief Alcohol Screening and Intervention of College Students (**BASICS**) has demonstrated effectiveness. You should know, however, that this non-confrontational, non-judgmental approach seeks to *reduce* underage and high-risk alcohol consumption rather than promote abstinence per se. In addition, while students may have the option to refer themselves to BASICS, most participants are referred only after violating the college's alcohol policies. Remember also that BASICS is a *prevention* strategy and therefore is not appropriate for youth who meet diagnostic criteria for alcohol dependence.



Besides talking about (and setting rules regarding) alcohol, what else can I do?

Beyond anything you may do or say specifically regarding alcohol, remember that there are many more general parenting behaviors that also help to prevent underage alcohol use. Think of these as a set of strategies to “parent for prevention.” If your child has developed a strong foundation in terms of self-esteem and plans for the future, avoiding alcohol use will become a logical and appealing choice. Your good parenting will then serve to reinforce this choice.

- Strive for a greater number of pleasant than unpleasant interactions with your child. All families with teens experience conflict from time to time, but get help if the conflict becomes overwhelming.
- Ask about your son or daughter's opinions and offer him or her real decision-making opportunities. A [*“Conversation Jar”*](#) is a fun tool for opening discussion during family dinners.
- Know where your teen is at all times and ensure a safe after-school environment. For college students, encourage choices that minimize risk (for example, it may be better to commute from home or live on campus than to live off-campus).
- For high-schoolers, monitor online and cell phone activity and do periodic “honesty checks” (e.g., check your child's backpack, verify his/her location, look at his/her Facebook page).
- Set realistic expectations for life goals and work together to help your son or daughter reach them.
- Identify your child's strengths and talents, and make sure s/he has opportunities to use them.
- Encourage extracurricular activities and constructive use of free time, particularly in college, when free time typically increases.
- Help your teen find positive ways to fit in and feel “cool.”
- Address any behavioral or mental health concerns (anxiety, depression, bullying) as soon as possible.
- Teach and model healthy skills for coping with stress, particularly during school transitions and the first year of college.

Facts about young people and depression...

- At any one time, more than one in 10 adolescents has symptoms of depression. There is also evidence that among teens, depression is more common among girls.⁵⁴
- Over a third of college students report that at least once during the past year, they were so depressed that it caused them to have difficulty functioning. Further, the rate of diagnosed depression among college students doubled between 2000 and 2005.⁵⁵

- Help your son or daughter succeed at school, not only in terms of academics, but also in terms of connecting to positive adults and peers.
- Before your son or daughter goes to college, work together on ideas for making new friends and minimizing social anxiety.
- During the first year of college, check in regarding the adjustment to new academic expectations and make sure your child knows how to access academic help.
- Identify school or campus activities and clubs that your son or daughter might enjoy.
- If your son or daughter is going away to college, encourage an appropriate level of freedom, but also plan in advance some ways in which you will try to stay connected.

A prevention expert's advice...

The Nine Facets of Parental Engagement

- Be there: Get involved in your children's lives and activities.
- Open the lines of communication and keep them wide open.
- Set a good example: Actions are more persuasive than words.
- Set rules and expect children to follow them.
- Monitor your children's whereabouts.
- Maintain family rituals, such as eating dinner together.
- Incorporate religious and spiritual practices into family life.
- Get Dad engaged, and keep him engaged.
- Engage the larger family of your children's friends, teachers, classmates, neighbors and community.

Source: Joseph A. Califano's *How to Raise a Drug-Free Kid: The Straight Dope for Parents*. Califano worked in the prevention field for several decades. From 1977 to 1979 he was the United States secretary of Health, Education and Welfare under President Lyndon Johnson.



For more parenting tips...

[Time to Talk](#)

[Time to Act](#)

[Parent Toolkit](#)

[A Parent's Guide to the Teen Brain](#)

[Parent "Decoder" for Teen Culture](#)

[CafeMom](#)

[The Drug and Alcohol Scene](#)

[Power of Parents](#)

[Set the Rules CT](#)

[Tips for Parents -
Underage Drinking in CA](#)

[ParentFurther.com](#)

[Navigating the Teen Years](#)

[Growing Up Drug-Free - A Parent's
Guide to Prevention](#)

[Shoulder to Shoulder -
Parent Support Network](#)

*The above links to online resources are available at
www.preventionworksct.org/parentguide.*

How can I get involved in prevention of underage drinking in my child's school and in my community?

Prevention of underage drinking begins at home, but requires community support in order to be successful. Activist parents are key to facilitating the "cultural shift" necessary for real change at the local and state levels. Consider getting involved in the following:

- Talk to friends and neighbors who have teens at home or in college. Share what you know, connect with other parents who set clear no-use rules for their sons and daughters, exchange parenting solutions, and brainstorm ideas for keeping kids safe. Some communities encourage homeowners to sign "pledges" that confirm their commitment to preventing underage access to alcohol.
- Joining the PTA or PTO at your child's school is a great way to advocate for prevention programs and strategies within the school, or to suggest materials and resources that can be distributed to parents (via email, newsletter or school events that parents are required to attend).
- Get to know the principal, school counselor and/or health/wellness teacher(s) at your son or daughter's school. Find out about prevention programs and practices in place now, and discuss new ones that might feasibly be implemented in the future (see the **"How schools can help prevent underage drinking..."** box earlier in this guide). Volunteer to help out with prevention activities (alcohol-free prom and graduation parties, arranging guest speakers, hosting parent forums, etc.).
- If you live near your college-age son or daughter's college or university, find out if there's a campus-community coalition that you can join.
- Encourage your child to join his/her school's Students Against Destructive Decisions ([SADD](#)) chapter, or to mobilize interested peers to start a chapter, if none exists.
- Encourage your middle- or high-school age son or daughter to get involved in summer Power Camp or other events offered through Mothers Against Drunk Driving ([MADD](#)).
- Contact the Regional Action Council (RAC) serving your area; consult a [list of RACs](#). Offer your help with a RAC prevention activity such as an awareness campaign, speaking engagement, parent forum or town hall meeting. The RACs are also connected to Local Prevention Councils (LPCs), which are coalitions located in particular cities/towns. Check out a [list of LPCs](#). If your city/town does not currently have a Local Prevention Council, let the Regional Action Council know that you'd be interested in helping start one. Coalitions are most successful when they involve a variety of people representing different "sectors" of the community including youth, parents, law enforcement, school administrators, and members of community organizations.



- Learn about what police (whether a local department or assigned state troopers) are doing to enforce underage drinking laws. For example, are compliance checks (“sting” operations that determine whether merchants are selling alcohol to minors) conducted regularly? Does your community have an anonymous tip line for reporting underage drinking activity? Are underage drinking parties routinely detected and dispersed? Have parents been arrested for hosting parties where minors are allowed to consume alcohol? Are there particular officers dedicated to underage drinking and other youth issues?
- Speak to legislators for your district and express your support for legislation that addresses underage drinking. [Learn about Connecticut's laws relevant to underage drinking](#). [Read this report](#) and [this guide](#) to understand recommendations regarding effective laws, policies and practices. You should also be aware of [national advocacy opportunities](#).
- Consider submitting a “letter to the editor” on the topic of underage drinking, and/or encouraging your child to submit one. Newspapers are always very interested in the youth point of view.



The Governor's Prevention Partnership can help by...

- Providing parents with written and online resources for preventing underage drinking.
- Offering speaking engagements within a variety of community sectors.
- Working with schools on prevention strategies and promoting positive school climate.
- Coordinating SADD chapters in schools across the state and starting new chapters.
- Partnering with Regional Action Councils (RACs) and Local Prevention Councils (LPCs) to implement proven community-level prevention strategies.
- Changing the “enforcement climate” of cities and towns by training police.
- Helping individuals, cities and towns raise media awareness.

**The Governor's Prevention
Partnership Web site:
www.preventionworksct.org**



Putting it All Together

We're not going to tell you it will always be easy. There will no doubt be times when your child will break rules, argue, or give you a hard time. Both you and your son or daughter will make mistakes, and you might wonder sometimes whether you're doing the right thing. Remember, though, that the full effects of your parenting may not be apparent until beyond the teen years. While there are no magic bullets when it comes to "parenting for prevention," the advice in this guide can be summed up in a few words of wisdom:



- A good income, good schools and a "good kid" do not override the need for good parenting.
- Begin incorporating discussion of alcohol into everyday conversations with your son or daughter *early*; continue these talks *often*.
- Seek support from other parents who share your family's values.
- While it's important to say "I don't want you to drink," you should also put a lot of effort into helping your child to believe for him/herself, "I don't want to drink."
- There are things only *you* can provide for your child—there are also times when you should involve other caring adults or professionals in his/her life.
- Your community needs you—parents who care about prevention are a powerful force for change.
- Don't give up, and don't give in. Investing in your child's well-being will be well worth the effort.

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With a focus on Connecticut's youth, The Governor's Prevention Partnership is a statewide public-private alliance, building a strong, healthy future workforce through leadership in mentoring and prevention of violence, underage drinking, alcohol and drug abuse.



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